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THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE EMANCIPATION OF THE JEWS¹.

ALTHOUGH the French Revolution and the emancipation of the Jews are united in my title, the movement which led up to complete political emancipation of the Jews commenced quite independently of the general political upheaval in France, and consequently it is not possible to obtain any clear and complete view of the march of the efforts which were made on behalf of the Jews by confining attention to the years immediately following 1788. Efforts to ameliorate the conditions of the Jews of France commenced to be made many years before, and it is only because the movement merged into the greater national upheaval during the years 1789-91 that the one politically becomes part of the other.

I propose, therefore, in spite of the title, which is slightly misleading, to confine attention to a brief survey of the efforts for the amelioration of the lot of the Jews before 1789 and to the steps by which the National Assembly came to consummate in the years 1789-91 probably the most supreme act of justice which Europe has witnessed during the last 150 years.

In a country in which the people govern, political movement is only a visible expression of forces which are at work more or less deeply in the social organism. And on a cool review of the conditions and circumstances which attended the achievement of Jewish liberty in

¹ An Address delivered during the Cambridge Summer Meeting, August, 1906. The general scheme of the course of studies dealt with the eighteenth century, and three lectures on Jewish History were included : "Moses Mendelssohn" (by Dr. A. Wolf), the lecture here printed, and "Jewish Life in the Eighteenth Century" (by I. Abrahams).

France, one cannot doubt that it was only a small yet integral part of the colossal advance which Frenchmen made for mankind in the eighteenth century towards freedom and happiness.

It is not necessary here to dwell upon general events in France in the eighteenth century, the breakdown of the old social system, the annihilation of feudal ideas, the scorn for the Church and all its ways, and the propagation of new theories of the principles upon which society should be built. But two points it is desirable to bear in mind, (1) that out of the welter and ferment and chaos in which French ideas were plunged, men were slowly but surely grasping that which is now the first principle of government—that all men are to be treated as equal until it can be proved that some are a danger to society, and (2) the French mind of the eighteenth century was not inclined to argue inductively, but to seize upon a general principle and use it deductively regardless of immediate consequences. Generally logic could not wait upon opportunity, but opportunities had to be made to fit in with logic.

Thus when individuals are inclined to argue that this or that event which occurred elsewhere, in Germany or England or America, gave the immediate impulse to Jewish emancipation in France, they are allowing their national prejudices to greatly exaggerate the work of their countrymen. The pamphlet of Dohm on the condition of the Jews of Germany may have called attention to the miserable plight of the Jews of Alsace; the pamphlet of Mirabeau on the Jew Bill of 1753 in England, probably enlisted much sympathy in France for the Jews of Alsace, of whom few Frenchmen knew anything; the publication in France of the decree of emancipation granted by the State of Virginia almost certainly made French statesmen think that the same grant of liberty was no more dangerous in France. But each and all of these could have done little for the Jews: at best they could furnish only illustrations in

the argument of emancipators against the diatribes and prophecies of the clericals and anti-Semites. Jewish emancipation was due to the genius of Frenchmen for liberty and justice, to the provocation which the fatuous policy of the clericals gave to a people already bitterly incensed against them, and to the efforts which French Jews themselves made for their own salvation. Indeed, the movement for emancipation followed the same course in France as in every other country since: by their own efforts Jews obtained possession of their citizenship *de facto* before the Assembly gave them possession *de jure*. As the communes of Paris remarked, the National Assembly were only required to place the seal of the law upon those rights of citizenship which the Jews had already earned and which they already enjoyed.

In 1780 there were some 30,000 Jews within the French kingdom, dwelling practically in three districts only—some 20,000 in Alsace, some 5,000 or 6,000 in and about Bordeaux, and the rest either in Paris or scattered in small communities in several parts of the country. And it is as well to note that this concentration in few places constituted at once the strength and the weakness of the Jewish cause. On the one hand, it gave free play to the intellect of the doctrinaires who were numerous in the National Assembly, for they were enabled thus to argue in the abstract, independent of the prejudices, for or against, which the concrete generally engenders; on the other hand, it allowed the moderates in the Assembly—a word which is taken to mean moderate in opinion, but which most frequently means moderate in ability, in imagination, and in courage—to procrastinate because the evils of which the Jews complained were not at their doors, and the woes of 20,000 people were of little immediate account with men who had to save a nation. It was the great task of the Jews to draw these moderates into the camp of the liberators, and it was the achievement of the clericals to drive them thither.

Of the three communities of Jews only one could boast

of any degree of happiness and prosperity. The community of Bordeaux was an old one, composed for the most part of the descendants of those Jews who had been honoured residents of the south of France and the north of Spain before the baneful influence of the Inquisition spread its shadow over the land. They did not share in the expulsion which Charles VI decreed in 1394, because Bordeaux was then English territory; and when the English finally disappeared from French soil a more tolerant or a more greedy king took them under his protection. But it was not as Jews that they remained; they were compelled outwardly to assume the garb and the attitude of Christianity. For three centuries they lived in the light of day as Christians; they went to church and to confession, they joined in social and political functions ostensibly as Christians. In secret they cherished the old ideals of their fathers, which are the eternal ideals of Israel. In 1686 they were, however, recognized as Jews, paying to Louis XIV a protection tax as Jews; and from 1730 onwards they openly practised the rites which Judaism imposed. They built synagogues, and the church no longer found them within its walls. And from 1730 until the outbreak of the Revolution no one protested—surely a wonderful sign of the progress which religious toleration had made in France before Mendelssohn was born, or the idea of a Jew Bill in England was conceived, or the American Revolution was even whispered.

The participation of the Jews of Bordeaux in the duties of its citizens, its social, political, and military functions had a powerful effect on the cause of Jewish emancipation. They had the opportunity of proving their worth to their fellow citizens, and they used it. Their historic association with the commerce and development of the port, their patriotic bearing, their liberal attitude towards mankind generally, their commercial probity, and their manly dignity, won for them the commanding respect of their neighbours; so that when their hour of trial came it never

occurred to the Bordelais to regard the Jews of Bordeaux as anything but equals. No Christian Bordelais ever asked if Jews might eat with Christians ; he knew they did. No Bordelais inquired whether Jews could be good Frenchmen ; he had tried them and found them not wanting. Christian and Jewish Bordelais had lived and fought together, bled and died together ; and each had learned to respect the other's virtues if he could not share his faith. And therefore, when the Jews of Bordeaux in 1776 petitioned the king to grant them the right to settle in any part of France and to trade throughout the kingdom, there were few or none to protest. They received their letters patent and the confirmation of all their previous privileges. And in 1789 they exercised the franchise like other Bordelais to elect members of the National Assembly. I dwell somewhat upon the Bordeaux Jews, for, as we shall see, it was their position more than any other single fact or argument whatsoever which carried the Jews of France past the crisis of their fate.

The position of the Jews of Paris was in sharp contrast with that of their co-religionists in Bordeaux. They had received no general permission to return, and had crept back by ones and by twos because, with all the disadvantages of Paris, conditions elsewhere were quite as hard to bear. When their presence became known, a system of individual licences to reside was instituted. Most of the Jews in Paris had come from the German provinces, and in every case strict investigation was supposed to be made into the character and antecedents of applicants for the right to reside. As they were subject to the domiciliary visits of certain police officials, on whose report the retention of their property and indeed the possibility of mere existence depended, it is easy to see that at no time could they acquire more than was necessary for bare subsistence, and that their position resolved itself into a struggle to satisfy the greed of their official persecutors. The only Jews in Paris who found life at all tolerable were a few who had come from

Bordeaux and were under the protection of the court or of great nobles whom they served.

The Jews of Alsace were in a deplorable plight. Probably in the whole of Jewish history there have been few communities living under such conditions.

Practically the towns were hermetically sealed against them. They might only dwell in the villages, and in them money-lending was unhappily the only pursuit to which they might devote their intellect and their industry; and even in that the restrictions were so comprehensive and the administration of the law so completely in the hands of ill-wishers that every loan they made was almost irrecoverable if the debtor were inclined to refuse payment. As a consequence, their poverty and degradation could hardly reach a lower depth.

"The most hostile authors agree in depicting the Alsatian Jews of the end of the eighteenth century as poorly fed, clothed in rags, and possessing only a limited capital, which they loaned, and on the interest of which they realized enough to support themselves."

With little capital and less security they were compelled to make bargains with a peasantry almost as poor as themselves, and under such conditions that anti-Semites, whose paradise has always been the German provinces of Europe, had no difficulty in pointing out illegalities, in dwelling upon the oppressive nature of the loans, and consequently in arousing the bitter hostility towards the Jews of those who really were fellow victims of the same vile system.

Reviled for their odious calling, these Jews of Alsace were debarred from every means of livelihood which could have afforded them an escape from its toils. Commerce, trades, professions, agriculture, were all closed against them. Moreover, they groaned under the most oppressive imposts —poll tax, travellers' tax, residence tax, protection money, restricted rights of marriage—every economic evil which German ingenuity could devise. Victimized by official robbers and princely parasites, it only remained for them

to be the victims of ingenious roguery to find life unendurable. And a calamity due initially to such roguery fell upon them in the years immediately precedent to the revolution. In 1778 quittances from their debts to Jews were granted to the credulous peasantry by agents who were sent throughout the villages of Alsace by a lawyer, appropriately named Hell. The Jews repudiated the quittances, and their repudiation was supported by magistrates who were certainly not favourable to them. Yet the peasantry were aroused to commit every act of violence against the Jews by the virulence of their anti-Semitic leaders. Houses were destroyed, outrages of all descriptions were committed, Jews were driven forth from the villages and frequently murdered, and certainly in most cases payment of debts was refused. More it was impossible to endure. And at length the Jews resolved to appeal to the King for some amelioration in their lot.

The times were not altogether unpropitious for a great effort on behalf of the Jews. The stream of humanitarian pamphlets and discourses had poured through the whole of cultured France. "The geometrical method of thought," as Max Nordau calls it, "was producing its natural effect, and out of the declaration of human rights the men of the Great Revolution were deducing religious toleration and emancipation of all members of the human race." The Protestants had already had their turn, for the King had commissioned Malesherbes, his chief minister, to consider the restoration of Protestants to the position they had enjoyed under the Edict of Nantes, and in 1784 he commissioned him further to inquire if anything could be done to make the Jews of Alsace useful citizens and a happier people. But Malesherbes' attitude, though it may have been affected somewhat by the ideas of his time, was far removed from that of the revolutionary leaders. He approached the question of the Jews precisely as a humane politician of the old régime might be expected to approach it. He was concerned only to determine what

concessions humanity demanded and social conditions rendered safe.

Those who pleaded the cause of the Alsatian Jews demanded at once too much and too little. They of all people were scarcely affected by the doctrines of their time. Assimilation with the French would render the Jewish life impossible, and they were unwilling to make so colossal a sacrifice as it seemed to them. They, therefore, did not ask to be admitted as citizens of France—put in such a form their request would have seemed to Malesherbes an impudent demand—but desired to create for themselves a position which should give them all the economic advantages enjoyed by French citizens, and would at the same time allow them much of self-government. They demanded the maintenance of privileges accorded to certain among them, and for the rest the right of free residence in any part of the kingdom, of practising any profession, of possessing and cultivating the land, of admission to chambers of commerce, and the right to share in municipal government. In substance, such a position was more advantageous than that of the vast majority of Frenchmen themselves.

It is almost impossible to suppose that the Alsatian Jews expected to obtain all this. The Bordeaux Jews who, twenty-one years before, had procured the expulsion of Jews of Avignon from Bordeaux on the ground that they were beggars and parasites incapable of supporting themselves and likely to imperil their own position—an argument which became familiar to English Jews two years ago—on this occasion lent considerable aid to their co-religionists of Alsace. The recognized leaders of the Bordeaux Jews in Paris might have accomplished much for them had not the unenlightened attitude of the Alsatians themselves disgusted Malesherbes and worn out his patience. The result of Malesherbes' inquiry was of little practical value. The poll-tax was abolished, and under letters patent the Jews were granted a peculiar status under which, with the appearance of liberty, they

remained strangers in the nation, subject still to galling restrictions and a special system of police supervision even more galling.

But henceforward the Jewish question was never allowed to sink out of public notice. The Paris press began to take up the cause of the Jews, to examine their claims, and to express sympathy for this persecuted and miserable people. It may have been, as the clerics said, that the press was engineered by the wealthy Cerf Berr; it is more probable that the writers were largely actuated by their humanitarian principles and mainly by the burning hostility to the Roman Church and the privileged classes generally, for, it must be remembered, the exploitation of the Jews by means of taxes and imposts was almost entirely for the benefit of the nobility and ecclesiastics. The Jews themselves were not idle: for the first time Jews of Alsace began to write in French for the education of Frenchmen. Pamphlets were printed and circulated refuting the slanders, both religious and economic, with which the clergy and traders of Alsace alike loaded the Jews. The result was that gradually the question began to wear a different face—the economic part sank more and more into the background and gradually the matter evolved as a religious question. Journals and people outside Alsace began to couple together Protestants and Jews: the revocation of the Edict of Nantes was producing an effect which no Christian had anticipated.

The dawn began to break in Alsace too. In 1785 the Society of Arts and Sciences of Metz offered a prize for an essay on the subject "Are there means for making the Jews more useful and more happy in France?" Of the nine competitors, four were clergymen, and, of these, three were favourable to the Jews—there were still some Christians among the French clergy.

One of the three must be distinguished above all the many gallant Frenchmen who afterwards became champions of the Jews. If the Jews were inclined to make saints, then high up

in their hierarchy should they place the Abbé Grégoire. He was one of the prize-winners, and afterwards he was never absent from the hottest of the fight for the emancipation of the Jews. In the press and on the platform, in the salon and in the chamber, his pen and his voice never ceased to be employed on behalf of the Jews. It was from him that they invariably expected aid and support, and they were never disappointed. It was against him that the party of clerical and noble privileges directed all their venom and all their vituperation. They knew for whose smile he had deserted the party of the Church; they knew for how much he had sold his soul to the Jews; they knew by what intrigues he was to gain his bishopric; and among the tenderest names they had for him was Judas Iscariot. No charge was too absurd, no language too vile to be launched against him. But amid all this obloquy he marched on in simplicity and serenity till his work was done, and he saw the principles which he advocated in his essay sealed by the law of his country.

The prize essays were published in 1789. In the meantime the flood of literature on the Jewish question continued. In 1787 Mirabeau published in London a pamphlet entitled "On Moses Mendelssohn and the political regeneration of the Jews, and in particular on the revolution in their favour attempted in Great Britain in 1753." His general attitude was summed up in his own phrase; "Men who did not desire or were unfit for civil rights should be excluded from the State."

In his pamphlet Mirabeau mentioned the Act for Religious Liberty passed in the state of Virginia in 1785. Possibly the contention is correct that this Act had great influence on the minds of the statesmen of the Revolution and induced some to become warm advocates in the Jewish cause. It is true that the story of the struggle for Jewish rights in Virginia obtained much currency in France through the instrumentality of Thomas Jefferson, and it may be that this famous American himself brought over many to the

side of the Jews. But in subsequent debates in the Assembly there is scarcely a reference to America, and it is difficult to imagine that Frenchmen would cite instances from America of the civic capacity displayed by Jews when they had the living example of those of Bordeaux before the very eyes of the nation. France was in no humour to take examples from others ; she was bent on carving out her future in her own way and according to her own genius.

In the press one begins to remark the faint sound of a new note. More vehemently than ever the claims of Jews and non-Catholics were being asserted ; but it was only slowly that the claim for toleration receded and was replaced by a claim for full and free citizenship. At first the journals of Paris show something of timidity in their claim for the Jews, as though affected by the fear which prejudice always begets ; but gradually, as the nature of the opposition became manifest, the tone of uncertainty passed away, and, whatever their motives, there were no more consistent advocates of the Jews than the journalists of Paris¹.

It was, therefore, amid circumstances distinctly favourable to the Jews that the Estates General and subsequently the National Assembly met.

Of the 1,118 members a clear majority belonged to the third estate and the parish priests, all of whom had suffered from the neglect and insolence of the higher clergy and the grandes of the court, and these were also the oppressors of the Jews. And the whole of the Assembly was impregnated with the theories of the "social contract" and of the "Rights of Man." It is fairly evident that the Jews, therefore, thought themselves justified in expecting little opposition to their demands.

¹ It is perhaps necessary to remark that the politicians of the Coffee Houses were also frequently the leader writers of the Paris journals, and therefore the approval which the Press gave to the demands of the Communes had nothing of the nature of independent support.

But no one foresaw the chaos which was soon to display itself in the chamber, a chaos of ideas and motives which makes the formation of a consistent and continuous narrative henceforward an almost impossible task. There were initially no parties, no leaders, no discipline, no order; sentiment took the place of wisdom, and expediency became more and more another name for pressure of the populace outside. It is possible that the nobility of the chamber and the higher clergy might have co-operated loyally with the other estates to ameliorate the lot of oppressed classes, but by early August, 1789, the destructive tendencies of the majority had shown themselves; and there began to be formed naturally parties, bound together for self-preservation if for nothing else. The prelates and nobles formed one party, uniting to flout the parish priests and the commons and co-operating to defend their property and their privileges; the second, consisting of people sincerely desirous of good government, extracting their principles from books and carried away by pure logic; the third composed of those—lawyers and parish priests for the most part—who were impatient for change because they were not satisfied with their present condition. The last was the most numerous and in close alliance with the populace, which was rapidly getting out of hand and which had already proscribed many of the nobility and higher clergy and therefore completely alienated them from the cause of the revolution.

It was unfortunate that the Jewish question was introduced after these parties had begun to crystallize; for, for nearly two years, the fact made their fate not a matter of humanity as they expected and hoped, but, if I may stretch the meaning of a phrase somewhat, the sport of party politics. Roughly, the zealous supporters of the Jews belonged to the third of the parties; the second contained those who were indifferent, and who by good management might have permanently sided with the ecclesiastics; the first became violently hostile, but in many cases it is

probable that the Jews only shared in the hatred which the third party inspired.

The ground was broken in the National Assembly on August 22, by the motion of Count de Castellane, "No one shall be molested on account of his religious opinions."

Mirabeau was the first speaker. He demanded the abolition of a dominant Church, adding that sentiment which has since become famous: "I will not preach tolerance to you: in religion the utmost freedom is in my eyes a right so sacred that the word tolerance appears to me itself to smack of tyranny."

It was Rabaut St. Étienne, who belonged to the third party, however, who specifically introduced the Jews on this motion:

"I demand for the Protestants of France," said he, "I demand for all the non-Catholics of the kingdom, that which you demand for yourselves, liberty and equality of rights: I demand them for this people, sprung from Asia, always wanderers, always proscribed, always persecuted throughout these eighteen centuries."

And again:

"Taught by the long and bloody experience of centuries, taught by the errors of our fathers and their misfortunes, you will say, without doubt, it is time to cast away the weapons of savages, who glut themselves with the blood of our fellow citizens, it is time to surrender to them rights too long denied; it is time to break down the barriers of injustice which keep them apart from us; it is time to make them love a fatherland which has hitherto proscribed them and cut them off from its care."

"Fellow citizens who were to love France as a fatherland." This was the very voice of the Revolution: here was an ideal presented by a Frenchman which the Jews of Alsace five years before would have considered beyond the wildest dreams.

The leaders of the Jews in Paris took the cue immediately.

On August 26, 1789, i.e. four days after the opening

debate, they presented a petition to the Estates General claiming their rights as men. In the words of Leon Kahn, to whose writings I am throughout deeply indebted :—

“To obtain their rights they appealed to the philosophical sentiments of the deputies ; the Assembly had restored to man his pristine dignity ; the Jews felt assured that the Assembly would not make any distinction between one man and another.”

In the ensuing discussion the characteristics of the parties in the Chamber displayed themselves, but not in any very violent form. The more radical were for an immediate vote, the nobles and higher clergy felt, the one their privileges, and the other the religion they professed attacked, and were inclined to vote against the Jews ; but by far the majority were for a middle course, humane treatment, but not immediate emancipation. Hence the Assembly shelved the motion of Abbé Grégoire that the house should discuss the petition. But apparently the “Blacks,” that is, the clericals, and their allies from Alsace the anti-Semites, were somewhat fearful of a vote which might at any time be taken under dispassionate conditions. They sought to intimidate the Chamber by exciting a massacre in Alsace. It is not my part to harrow your feelings with a description of the excesses of which the partisans of the nobility and clergy were guilty. Suffice it, that they had many of the features of the pogroms of Russia, differing from them perhaps only in dimensions, and that only because there were few Jews to massacre, few to despoil. It was during the evening sitting of October 14 that news of the riots was announced to the assembled deputies : immediately a wave of indignation passed through the Chamber, amid which even the bitterest of the “Blacks” thought it well to be silent. Without hesitation it was decided to send an express courier to order the authorities in the disturbed districts to suppress the outbreak with all the powers at their command.

Grégoire and his supporters, induced by the evident
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emotion of the deputies, moved that the Jewish representatives be allowed to present their petition in person. Their speeches had so profound an effect that on a second motion of Grégoire the Jewish deputies were admitted into the body of the Chamber to assist at the session. However, the sitting came to an end without a definite vote being taken.

The Reactionaries had hoped by the disturbances in Alsace to frighten the Chamber into the belief that the Alsatians were immutably opposed to the emancipation of the Jews in their midst. The more timid and hesitating among the deputies probably were frightened, but, as a matter of fact, the riots helped to advance the cause they were meant to delay. Many of the Chamber felt their humanity outraged, and the authority of the Assembly defied by the enemies of the revolution ; and the net effect was to hasten the crystallization of parties which were little more than in the stage of generation.

On December 21 the Jewish question was again introduced as part of a more general motion. Brunet de la Tuque proposed that non-Catholics should be eligible for the National Assembly.

Le Comte Clermont Tonnerre enlarged the motion by his amendment to the effect that "no active citizen should be excluded from the public service on account of his profession or his religion."

Rewbell—the leader of the Alsatian deputies—sprang to his feet, and demanded excitedly : "Does the Count include Jews among active citizens ?"

"Yes," shouted the Count, "I include the Jews, and I glory in the fact."

For three days the discussion continued amid great passion and excitement. The protagonists were Robespierre, Barnave, Beaumetz, Clermont Tonnerre, and Mirabeau for the Jews: for their opponents, Rewbell, the Bishop of Nancy, and Abbé Maury. It is almost evident from these names that the debate had resolved itself into a struggle

between the extreme parties, and that the immediate question was not the important issue at stake. Some of the most ardent champions of the Jews belonged to the party which was most directly at command of the populace of Paris, and these people had already proscribed the Abbé Maury and the Bishop of Nancy as enemies of the nation. The opposition of the latter may have been partly explained by their proscription.

On the third day a deputy, Duport, proposed an amendment which, whilst securing all that Tonnerre desired, would in its drafting, he thought, be less offensive to certain of the opposition.

Still amid tumult and excitement the motion for priority of this amendment was put to the vote. Twice it was impossible to take the numbers on account of the noise and confusion. Finally, when the deputies voted by name, priority was refused by 408 to 403—a majority of five in a house of 813.

In estimating the significance of this small majority it is necessary to remember that the Estates General were still young, that many members voted with the Conservatives because they felt that the velocity of the stream was too great, and that they were being hurried out of their depth. Many of these could still be won over either by convincing them of the justice of Jewish claims, or that it was the existence of the Chamber that was at stake, or by the menace of popular dissatisfaction. The deputies and the popular journalists in Paris were well aware of this, and hence did not hesitate to express their jubilation, rejoicing that in this, one of the first real struggles with the Church, on a question in which religion, prejudice, and vested interests were all in favour of their opponents, these could command a majority of five only. The Clericals, too, felt the precarious nature of their majority, and determined to push their advantage whilst there was yet a chance of success: they meant to have a specific declaration of the Estates General excluding Jews for ever

from the nation. Rewbell demanded expulsion from the country; Maury only proposed to give them a limited toleration; but Clermont Tonnerre killed the proposition—"we cannot have a nation within a nation," said he, a statement which appealed to the philosophical sentiments of the House.

Nevertheless, the foremost of the emancipators saw that the debate must soon come to an end: every one was weary of the subject, and in the present temper of the House it was clear that the contest would certainly not go in their favour. It was necessary to devise some means for drawing a battle that could not then be won. They, therefore, seized upon the obvious willingness of the greater number to have done with the question, at least for the time, by amending the motion. The Assembly finally accepted the following:—"The Estates General agree that non-Catholics are eligible for all civil and military offices equally with all other citizens, without, however, deciding anything relative to the Jews, whose case they reserve for future judgment."

Thus the champions of the Jews saved them from utter exclusion at this stage by a postponement of the question. The Clericals were still strong enough to defend their last fence, and it was desirable to wait till they had lost a few more men in other forays before attacking it again.

I must ask you at this stage to return for a moment to the consideration of the attitude of the several sections of Jews in France during this first year of revolution. From the year 1781 until the first days of the Estates General there had been an appearance of unity of action by all sections of Jews. It was, however, only an appearance.

For the most part the attitude of the Bordeaux Jews was one of sympathy for their Alsatian brethren, but there was nothing of the sentiment of organic unity in their behaviour. The needs of the one before the revolution were not the needs of the other: whilst, on the one hand, the Alsatian Jews envied the lot of the Bordelais, the latter had little

amelioration to desire economically, and it was only economic amelioration which was at that time obtainable.

And the natural allies of the Bordeaux Jews when the Estates were convened were not those of Alsace. It must be remembered that the convention of the Estates was due not only to an uprising of the proletariat, but certainly as much to the determination of the wealthier and vain bourgeoisie to wrest something of political power from a beggared and worn-out aristocracy. It was with this bourgeoisie that the Bordelais felt most community of interest, and this class had considerable power in the Estates.

On reviewing the forces at work and the composition of the Estates, therefore, the Bordeaux Jews were justified in their opinion that a united effort would carry all Jews without exception into the ranks of French citizens. They could reckon on the support of their own class to maintain their own position; they could not believe that they had lost the sympathy of the nobles, which had enabled them to obtain full rights in 1776; they probably calculated that the theories which guided the deputies would also work strongly in their favour, and they had no reason to believe that the anti-Semitic sentiments of a handful of deputies from Alsace would affect any formidable section of the Chamber.

The debate of August 22 somewhat undeceived them. After that co-operation almost ceased, and the vote of December 24 broke up the apparent union completely.

The condition in which the Jewish question was left by the Assembly in December not only worked negative injury to the Jews in that it denied the admission of the Alsatians to full citizenship, but worked positive injury in that it practically robbed the Portuguese Jews of rights which they had enjoyed for two centuries. The latter had not expected apparently that there would ever be any question regarding their position, which they believed firmly established; and when they found that the word "Jew" natur-

ally applied to them as well as to the Jews of Alsace they were thrown into a state of intense alarm. They were immediately at immense pains to prove that they ought not in any degree to be confounded with their co-religionists in Alsace. Although the statements they made and the attitude they adopted towards their fellow Jews fully deserved the censure which they drew upon themselves at the time from the more enlightened French journals and French deputies, nevertheless it was their agitation which carried the question of Jewish emancipation past its crisis. It was impossible for the National Assembly to give these Jews a position inferior to that which they had enjoyed under French kings: it became impossible logically to deny rights to one set of Jews which were conferred upon another. That was the position into which the Assembly had been driven, and the Assembly yielded to the logic of the situation.

On December 31, 1789, the Bordeaux Jews presented an address to the Assembly, in which they claimed that they should be distinguished from the rest of the French Jews, and should be enrolled in the number of full citizens. The petition was submitted to the "Constitution Committee," and by them entrusted to Talleyrand, Bishop of Autun, for examination and report. On January 28, 1790, the Bishop reported in these terms:—

"The Revolution, which has made the recovery of their rights possible for all Frenchmen, cannot be the agent of their loss to any such citizens. Consequently, whilst deciding nothing upon the general question which has been adjourned, the Committee proposes to the Assembly to accord to the Jews of Bordeaux that which they so justly demand, and to declare them full citizens with the same rights as all other citizens."

As the Paris journals did not fail to point out, it was difficult to believe that any one would have the effrontery to oppose so reasonable a proposition. When the motion came before the House, however, Rewbell assayed to oppose

it, but immediately from all parts of the assembly there arose such a cry of indignation, such an uproar, that his voice was drowned amid the din, and he was compelled to resume his seat. His party, however, were not deterred from moving amendments to the original motion, which would have given the Bordeaux Jews an inferior position and provisional rights.

Even the friends of the Bordeaux Jews, or rather those who were not unfavourable to their cause, moved numerous amendments, every one of which would have restricted in some particular their full enjoyment of active citizenship.

Amid a scene wilder and more tumultuous than that of December, De Séze, the deputy for Bordeaux, in order to keep faith with his constituents, as he said, submitted a motion demanding for them simply “the rights of active citizens.”

The scene amid which this motion was put to the vote reminds one of nothing so much as an Irish night in Parliament of the early eighties. It is thus described¹ :—

“A first count appeared doubtful. A second was made ; there was no doubt in the greatest part of the House ; every one was almost convinced that the motion was carried ; among the secretaries only one was undecided ; it was necessary to have recourse to a vote by roll-call. It is impossible to describe the tumult which, during two long hours, detracted from the dignity, even the solemnity, of the Assembly’s proceedings. A continual clamour arose from that part of the hall occupied by members of the former orders of the clergy and the nobility. The zeal of the Bishops and their hatred of the Jews gave to these saintly men a holy passion. They leaped out of their seats, rushed hither and thither in disorder and tumult over the Chamber : when the secretaries raised their voices to call the names they were drowned by the uproar and confusion. Cries, shouts, interruptions crossed and recrossed with

¹ Léon Kahn, *Les Juifs de Paris pendant la Révolution*.

increasing violence, whilst the populace without the barriers gave emphatic evidence of its indignation. This scene, the most shameful and disgusting that it is possible to imagine, lasted two hours ; two hours during which the calling of the roll was every instant drowned in the tremendous uproar. Twenty times the roll was begun, stopped, resumed amid this unceasing and disgusting turmoil. The opposition called for adjournment. But such was the devotion of the patriotic party that the members of it preferred to pass the night without food rather than abandon thus the *cause of the people*. They remained fixed in their seats, and waited the event of this astonishing scene. The president, the representative in this respect of the most numerous part of the Assembly, declared that all these efforts to prevent the roll-call would be futile. Many members—chiefly among the clerics—tried another trick. They left the House, hoping thus to break up the sitting. Shouts were heard that the sitting had not been legally suspended, and the absence of certain members could not break up the deliberations. At length the temperature of the Chamber, the suffocating atmosphere, the noisome dust which the excited movements of 800 people spread about, and finally exhaustion or impatience brought the deputies to reason. Little by little their cries, their mutterings became first feeble, and finally died away ; the naming of the members and their answers 'Yes' or 'No' became audible, and the voting followed its regular course."

Only 598 members voted, and the motion was carried by 373 votes to 225. It was confirmed next day by the king.

The next effort of the reactionaries was an attempt to extract from the Assembly a specific declaration that the Jews of Alsace were not included in the rights which had been conferred on their coreligionists in Bordeaux. The motion had a specious air of non-committal, but the Assembly rightly understood that a specific motion of such a kind was in reality a motion hostile to the Alsatian Jews, and therefore the motion was rejected.

It remained for the reactionaries only to raise those political conflagrations which they had prophesied. This they proceeded to do with all the energy at their command. They sent emissaries to Bordeaux for the purpose, and although the people of Bordeaux would have none of them, they nevertheless caused reports to be spread in Paris that the Bordelais were up against the Jews. They clearly reckoned on the advantage in time which difficulties in communication would give them to animate the more timid and encourage the more obstinate of their party in rushing some hostile motion through the Assembly. But hard on the heels of their report came that from the authorities and leading Jews, stating that there was no sign of hostility ; on the contrary, according to their own accounts, the Jews were met everywhere with nothing but expressions of friendliness and congratulation, in short, in the true spirit of fraternity which the laity of France realized, and the clergy, as ever, professed.

In the Assembly itself the special message which the Jews sent informing the members of the perfect good fellowship and perfect security which they enjoyed was received with rounds of applause. It was obvious at this stage that the deputies as a whole had nothing but the friendliest sentiments for Frenchmen of the Mosaic faith ; what active opposition existed was entirely an artificial production of the German element in league with the Clerical and noble opponents of the popular party.

Practically every section of the nation able to voice its opinions, except the very bigoted Clericals, saw that opposition was now illogical, if not absurd. The only difference arose on the question of time. Some were for immediate emancipation, most still clung to the idea that there was no reason for an immediate decision, and yet others were still deterred by the threats of massacres made by Rewbell and the anti-Semites. The Assembly, therefore, was inclined to procrastinate, and in spite of the tremendous pressure brought to bear upon them by the Paris

press, public opinion in general, and the steady determination of the Alsatian Jews, they were able to ward off a decision so long as they met outside the confines of Paris. The Alsatian Jews were, of course, fully conscious of the strength which their position had acquired by the emancipation of the Bordeaux Jews: their petitions were now emphatically demands, and no longer requests for consideration. Nominally debarred from the activities of citizens, the Jews in Paris found themselves welcome recruits in the ranks of a people who had become impatient with the Assembly and the opposition of the Court party. They were thus able to create for themselves in Paris a position which their *confrères* had earned in Bordeaux. They readily performed every duty which was required of every other citizen, whenever and wherever opportunity offered, and opportunities were not few. Thus the people of Paris became accustomed to act with Jews, to understand their qualities, and appreciate their public spirit and philanthropy. So that ultimately it became as ridiculous in Parisian eyes to deny legally to Jews those rights and duties which it was perfectly obvious they were not only able and willing to exercise, but which more and more events, in fact, thrust upon them.

By this time the Communes, those sixty independent Republics, were become the dominant powers in the situation; and every gust of passion which swept over Paris carried with it the National Assembly, whether it were willing or not. The leaders of the Parisian Jews were not slow in perceiving who were the masters of the situation, and whilst not ceasing to petition the Assembly from whose initiative they hoped nothing, they addressed themselves zealously to earn the good opinion and the advocacy of the Communes.

A petition was presented to the "General Assembly of Representatives of the Communes" on January 28, 1790, asking for support. On the 30th the District of the Carmelites presented a deputation, who argued that they had

greater opportunity than any other for observing the conduct of the Jews. They summed up the position in these words :—

“ If they are not yet Frenchmen, they deserve to be. They are already in our midst: in truth, they already possess the rights of citizens; all that is missing is the seal of the law.”

The General Assembly of the Communes resolved to petition the National Assembly to occupy itself without delay with the Jewish question, and to pass a decree assimilating them to other citizens; but not to present the petition until every district in Paris had been asked for its approval. Of 60 districts 53 positively accepted the resolution, the votes of six are unknown, one only disapproved. But more interesting than the actual vote are the terms of the letters from the several districts announcing the result of their deliberations. The same note was struck throughout, varied only by the degree of cordial appreciation which they expressed of the Jews as fellow citizens and honest men.

On February 25 the Assembly of the Communes presented their petition to the National Assembly to hasten the legal enrolment of the Jews of Paris among the citizens of France.

The Jews of Paris must have felt at this time that the battle was won; but they had to wait eighteen months to obtain legally those rights which they enjoyed in fact. The middle party were still sufficiently numerous to cause procrastination, and it was necessary that the anti-Semitic party should create more enemies and utterly disgust everyone before a decision could be obtained. And, indeed, the anti-Semitic party were not slow to seize every opportunity to create friends for the Jews. They again excited the Assembly by instigating riots in Alsace early in April, and compelled the Assembly again to exert its authority. They opposed the motion to naturalize certain classes of residents among whom a number of Jews would have been included. They secured the exclusion of Jews when the Assembly

decided that non-Catholics were eligible for the judicial bench; and when the Constitution Committee of the National Assembly reported that all Jews possessing letters patent from the king were necessarily classed with the Portuguese Jews, on whom citizenship had been already conferred, they were able to have the report referred back to the Committee.

But the two debates which secured for the Jews more votes than all others together were those relating to the sale of unnecessary church buildings in Paris and to the removal of the poll-tax on Alsatian Jews, which was levied solely for the benefit of the De Brancas family. The populace were starving: the sale of the buildings would enable the Communes to feed them; the Jews were generously placing their means at the disposal of the people; the clerics not only denied them the sources of relief, not only maintained a corrupt demand on the resources of the Jews for the benefit of a parasitic family, but charged the Jews with being the real instigators and authors of the motion for the sale of the churches. In fact, almost every step the clerics took with regard to these two motions tended to laud the Jews as friends of the people and denounce themselves as their enemies: and they made it impossible for any man to remain neutral who did not wish to appear also among the enemies of the nation. Hence the anti-Semites were not able to obtain more than a small number of votes on either occasion, and both motions were carried amid loud applause.

Seeing that the deputies were growing more and more impatient with the factious opposition of the anti-liberty party, the Jews of Paris thought the moment favourable to present again their demand for political liberty. They urged precisely the same arguments which had been used by the Jews of Bordeaux on their own behalf—long residence, obedience to the laws, their devotion to their country, their zeal in the cause of liberty. Ungenerously by implication they separated their cause from that of their brethren

in Alsace, who were not allowed so much freedom of action. The Assembly again referred the matter to the Constitution Committee. But the Jews of Paris did not cease their efforts: they induced the local counsellors to petition the National Assembly again to hasten to confer formally on them the rights which they actually enjoyed. The Assembly was about to disperse, but on Sept. 27, 1791, Duport excitedly demanded that the Jews should enjoy *in France* the rights of active citizens. So far had the justice of the claim penetrated, and so weary were all of the subject and the opposition, that no astonishment was expressed. Only Rewbell assayed to protest, but he was not allowed to speak. On the next day Duport formally presented his motion. Rewbell made a last effort, but a fellow deputy put a hand over his mouth, and the motion was immediately passed by common consent.

Generally the press published the decree without comment. The religious papers regarded it as another blow against the clergy, but only feebly protested.

The massacres in Alsace, so loudly prophesied, did not take place; and thus the struggle which had been ushered in amid so much turmoil and bloodshed reached its appointed end amid profound calm.

English Jews may pray—and I am sure that their fellow countrymen of another faith will pray with them—that a similar drama which is now unfolding itself in another land may have an equally peaceful and happy issue.

I. H. HERSCH.